

2021-K783

Assembly Resolution No. 783

BY: M. of A. Aubry

CELEBRATING the life, legacy and Birthday of the
late Granville T. Woods on April 23, 2022

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body, in keeping with its time-honored traditions, to recognize and pay tribute to those who seek to preserve and celebrate the African-American heritage of our State and Nation; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is justly proud to celebrate the life, legacy and Birthday of the late Granville T. Woods on Saturday, April 23, 2022, at St. Michael's Cemetery in East Elmhurst, New York; and

WHEREAS, This momentous occasion was celebrated with a dedication performed by David L. Head, a historian and advocate for Granville T. Woods and other Black pioneers of transportation, who appeared in costume to tell the story of inventive genius and thwarted promise; and

WHEREAS, Granville T. Woods, a contemporary of Thomas Edison, was born to free African Americans on April 23, 1856 in Columbus, Ohio; he received little formal education, but enthralled by trains, he worked in a railroad shop and learned about metalworking and mechanical engineering; and

WHEREAS, After working as a fireman shoveling coal into steam boilers, Granville T. Woods was promoted to engineer; he went on to hold various engineering and industrial jobs before establishing a company to develop electrical apparatus; and

WHEREAS, Known as "Black Edison" for his inventions in electricity,

Granville T. Woods registered nearly 50 patents in his lifetime, including a telephone transmitter, a trolley wheel and the multiplex telegraph; his first U.S. patent, in 1883, was for a steam boiler furnace; and

WHEREAS, In 1893, Granville T. Woods was instrumental in developing an Electric Railway Conduit, the third rail which powers our nation's subways; the electrification of the Figure 8, a Coney Island roller coaster; and a wireless communications system which decreased the number of railroad accidents and other crucial errors; and

WHEREAS, In 1891, Granville T. Woods moved to New York City and found a niche for himself as an inventor, partly through connections with General Electric; however, his race during this time sentenced this remarkable man to a life of struggle and he was often embroiled in court over the rights to his patents, clearly illustrating the harsh realities of being a Black inventor at the end of the 19th century; and

WHEREAS, Granville T. Woods died on January 30, 1910, in New York City, at the age of 53; he is buried at St. Michael's Cemetery in East Elmhurst, New York; and

WHEREAS, In the gradual rediscovery of Black history, Granville T. Woods began to gain much deserved recognition and respect for his many achievements; and

WHEREAS, In his 1968 book, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. cited Granville T. Woods as "an expert in electric motors, whose many patents speeded the growth and improvement at the beginning of this century"; and

WHEREAS, P.S. 335 in Bedford Stuyvesant has been named the Granville T. Woods Elementary School, and Western Electric commissioned a bronze marker for his unmarked grave at St. Michael's Cemetery in 1975; additionally, in 2004, for the centennial celebration of the New York City subway system, the MTA issued four million MetroCards commemorating Granville T. Woods; and

WHEREAS, Furthermore, nobody has done more to promote Granville T. Woods's legacy than David L. Head, who learned about the inventor while writing for the Transit Workers Union Black history committee; and

WHEREAS, Throughout the course of American history, Black innovators such as Granville T. Woods have used their great talents to vastly improve devices and communications for the electric railway system in the United States; on April 23, 2022, we honor this true pioneer whose purposeful life and accomplishments will forever stand as a paradigm and inspiration for others; and

WHEREAS, Events which provide a means of preserving a part of our rich American past and which contribute to the community in such noble endeavors, are held in the highest regard by this Legislative Body; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to celebrate the life, legacy and Birthday of the late Granville T. Woods on April 23, 2022; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to David L. Head and St. Michael's Cemetery, East Elmhurst, New York.